MUSICAL
INTERPRETATION

ITS LAWS AND PRINCIPLES, AND THEIR APPLICATION IN
TEACHING AND PERFORMING

BY

TOBIAS MATTHAY

(PROFESSOR, LECTURER AND FELLOW OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC, LONDON, AUTHOR OF "THE ACT OF TOUCH," "FIRST PRINCIPLES," "SOME COMMENTARIES ON PIANO PLAYING," "RELAXATION STUDIES," "THE CHILD'S FIRST STEPS," "THE ROTATION ELEMENT," ETC. FOUNDER OF THE TOBIAS MATTHAY PIANOFORTE SCHOOL, LONDON.)

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PREFACE

For many years past I have been urged to put into a permanent and available form my enunciation of those Principles and Laws of Interpretation, knowledge of which has proved to be one of the main causes of the success of the army of teachers who have arisen from my school.

The first step towards this end was the preparation, in the year 1909, of a set of Lectures covering this ground. These I condensed later into a single lecture, and this was first delivered publicly in Manchester to Dr. Carroll's Association of Teachers during the season of 1909–10. Subsequently, it was repeated to the Edinburgh Musical Education Society, to the London Music Teachers' Association (in 1910) and its Branches; it was also given at the Royal Academy of Music in the same year, and at my own School, and elsewhere.

A full synopsis also appeared in the "Music Student" of April, 1911, and elsewhere. I, nevertheless, still delayed issuing the material in book form, as I felt, in view of the extreme importance of the matters dealt with, that I would like to expand it, but lack of time has prevented my doing so.

As, however, some of our more up-to-date theorists are now doing me the honour to apply, in their recent works, some of the ideas first enunciated in these lectures of mine (and in my "First Principles," 1905, and "Act of Touch," 1903) such, for instance, as the vital one of recognizing in *Progression* or *Movement* the actual basis of all Rhythm and Shape in Music, I feel compelled to issue these lectures now as originally delivered. Additional matter is given in the form of Notes; and I leave for later on, perhaps, the issue

of a Supplement giving further details and illustrative Examples.

It will be found, that while this work deals with the subject mainly from the pianist's point of view, nevertheless most of the principles here formulated apply with equal force to all other forms of musical performance. Many of the same laws of Interpretation which apply to Pianoforte playing also hold good whether we are players of stringed instruments or wind instruments, or are vocalists or organ-players or conductors. We cannot play even on a penny whistle without coming under the sway of such laws! Hence I hope that this little volume may prove helpful to all music-teachers and would-be performers, artists as well as students, whatever their specialty.[1]

Some of the main points here dealt with are: (*a*) the difference between letting a pupil shift for himself and helping him to learn; (*b*) the difference between mere cramming and real teaching; (*c*) the difference between merely making a pupil "do things" and teaching him to think — to the end that he may know what to do, why to do it, and how to do it; (*d*) the exposition of the true nature of Rhythm and Shape in Music — as Progression or Movement towards definite landmarks; (*e*) the true nature of Rubato in all its forms, small and large, simple and compound, and the laws of its application; (*f*) consideration of the element of Duration, and, allied to this, rules as to the application of the damper-pedal; also, rules as to the application of Tone-variety, Fingering, Memorizing, etc., and some speculations as to the ultimate reason of the power that Music has over us.

To prevent misunderstanding, I must at once state that

[1] Helpful even to the operators of mechanical pianos.

I do not claim that artists are "made" by the mere enunciation and teaching of such laws and principles as here given, or by those of instrumental technique — although no success can be attained without obedience to these same laws and principles. No, the really great artist always has been, is now, and ever will be, a most rare phenomenon. His advent depends on so many things uniting in one single individual — the highest gifts of imagination and invention, therefore high mental powers (yes, the really great artist must also have high reasoning power), physical and mental endurance, extreme enthusiasm for his chosen art, good health, and the *opportunities* to acquire the requisite skill *to work in strict obedience to the laws of his art.*

Hence it is not claimed that the truthful Analysis and Synthesis of art or its technique can transform dullards into poets and seers, but what *has been amply proven* is, that such teachings do inevitably help the ordinary student to succeed in attaining to far higher ideals than he could have reached without such help, and that the "heaven-born" Genius (when he does appear) has many years of useful life added to his career, years otherwise wasted in futile experiments, while his path towards still higher perfections is thus rendered possible and easy — and his appreciation of truth in art made more sound. Such teaching therefore makes for Progress, not only in Music but in Life itself.

In thanking the many who have encouraged me to undertake the publication of this little work, I must also again thank Mrs. Kennedy-Fraser, of Edinburgh, for her invaluable help with my proofs.

TOBIAS MATTHAY.

HASLEMERE, September, 1912.

CONTENTS

SECTION I

INTRODUCTORY

SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING — PAGE

PREFACE v
Points selected for elucidation 1
General attitude of the teacher 2
The learner can only be helped to learn 2
The first law of teaching 2
The most usual fault of the teacher 3
Both teacher and pupil must learn to think 3
How to practise 4
The danger of Automaticity 4
The danger of not really listening 5
"Listening" defined 5
Automatic practice useless, even for techniques 5
We do not really see or hear unless we analyse 6
As to ear-training, good and bad 7
Definition of real practice 8
Constant process of analysis proved necessary 9
"Genius" implies natural concentration on one's work 9
Practice implies study 9
By learning concentration we can all approximate to the Genius level 10
Not only concentration but imagination necessary 10
The imaginative power must be trained 10
The forms of analysis necessary in teaching 11
The use of Example 12
The artist as teacher 13
The informative and the non-informative types of mind 13
The teacher must be artistic 14
Why unaided example will not suffice 14
Example v. Explanation 15
The necessity of Enthusiasm 17

PAGE
Bad and good teaching 18
Cramming v. real teaching 19
To render a pupil "musical" 20
Bad and good conducting 20
Teaching v. cramming again 21
Make sure of your diagnosis before correcting a fault 21
Concrete cases as examples 22
Correction of inaccuracy as to Time-details 24
Playing out of time implies lack of attention 24
Uselessness of the Metronome as a Time-teacher 24
Faults arising from bad touch habits 25
How to correct a wrong *tempo* 26
The *causes* of faults must always be made clear 26
True education 27

SECTION II

THE NATURE OF MUSICAL ATTENTION AND OF MUSICAL SHAPE

Attention through key-resistance and time 28
Meaning of "Time-spot" 29
The Act of Thought, or Attention, itself implies a rhythmical act 30
Also see pp. 41, 59, and Section VI.
Similarity between playing out of time and playing out of tune 30
"Grip" in performance 31
As to Time-training 31
As to the interpretation of the term "Rhythm" 31
Correct ideas of Time and Shape in Music 32
Progression and Movement analogous in Music and Painting 32
The origin of our sense of Pulse 32
The *progressional* view of music v. the old *segmental* view 34
The difference between the old *segmental* view of structure, and the *progressional* view of musical structure 35
Some examples of the Progressional view of structure 36
The incorrect notation of bar-lines 38
As to Nomenclature of structural details 39
Harmonic movement necessary 40
The process of Memorising also depends upon Progression 41, 59
Deliberate indefiniteness in composition 42
How to apply one's memory 42
Memory-failure 42
The various kinds of musical memory 43
The necessity of muscular memory and its dangers 43

PAGE
Silent practice 43
To prevent "slithering" 44
Inaccuracy in the sub-divisions of the pulses owing to non-perception of the Element of Progression 46
Progression always towards climax of phrase in spite of *decrescendo* 47
Passages broken between hands; correct thinking of them 49
Broken passages, technical errors 51
Wrong Bass notes — and other notes 53
Progression in its larger swings 54
Warning against purely mechanical "scanning" 54
To keep the *whole* in view is a question of memory 56
"Thinking the Whole" expounded 56
Perception of a new composition 57
The cause of stammering unmusically 59

SECTION III

The Element of Rubato

Tempo-continuity, why necessary 60
Continuity also depends upon tonal and emotional planning-out 60
True nature of Rubato usually quite misunderstood 61
Rubato is no mystery, it is not "silent-sound" not "telepathy" 61
Ritardandos and Accellerandos are not Rubato 62
The true rationale of Rubato 63
Time-curves constantly required 63
Rubato in modern music 64
Rubato in older music 65
Fallacy re the old masters being unemotional 65
In giving emotional life, Shape must not be lost sight of 66
When to teach and learn Rubato 67
The problem of music for Children 67
The two distinct fundamental forms of Rubato:
(I) The "leaning" Rubato 70
Rubato supplies the strongest forms of emphasis 70
(II) The "push-on" Rubato 71
The two forms may be combined 71
Ritardandos and Accellerandos marked in text, often found to be incorrectly noted Rubatos 71
The exact position of the return to the pulse must be noted 72
The cause of the Rubato also to be noted 72
Rubato allows a phrase-climax to be shown in decrescendo 72

PAGE
Fallacy regarding position of phrase-climax 73
Attack of phrase 73
Various forms of Rubato illustrated:
(I) The more usual form, or "leaning" Rubato 74

All Means of Expression must always be applied solely to express Music 74, and pp. 79, 120, 121, and Section VI.

Tone-amount varies with note-lengths in uneven passages 75
In a slow movement, tone for the quicker notes is reduced from a high background 76
In a quick movement the reverse process applies 76
Further examples of "leaning" Rubato 78
Rubato-inflections must always be carried out subtly 79
Example of Rubato-analysis — the first two bars of Chopin's ballade in A flat 80
Example of Rubato showing trend of phrase in spite of diminuendo 82
Example of Rubato showing cross-accent 83
Again, the importance of "scanning" 84
Rubato required to depict agitation 86
Always shapeful, however veiled the shapes 86
Definiteness, Decision, best expressed without Rubato inflections 87
Illustrations of these Distinctions emotionally 87–89
Mis-scanning of Chopin's Scherzos again 87, 89
Illustrations of Rubato continued:
(II) *The push-on or inverted Rubato* 92
Examples of the combination of the two forms of Rubato 97
Modern Rubato examples from Beethoven 102
Rubato can show accent on a rest or tied note 104
Rubato always in the nature of a curve, never a time-spike 104
Always keep in view Musical Purpose, during Rubato-inflections 105
Also *see* pp. 99, 79

SECTION IV

CONCERNING CERTAIN DETAILS IN THE APPLICATION OF TONE-INFLECTION AND THE BEARING OF TOUCH-TEACHING AND FINGERING, ETC., ON INTERPRETATION

The importance of Rubato does not detract from the importance of Tone and Duration Contrasts 107
Lack of tone-variety often not realised by the teacher 107
Need of accurate listening and analysing again demonstrated 108
Want of true *pp* is mostly the cause of deficiency in colouring 109

PAGE
After a long note, the continuation of the *same* phrase is often played too loudly 110
Cut away the tone to render certain notes prominent 110
The individualisation and balance of the constituent notes of chords, octaves, etc. 112
An exercise for tonal individualisation 112
Less force required to produce the higher notes than the lower notes of the Piano 115
The tonal emphasising of melody notes should not lead to tasteless agoggic accents 115
The bearing of the teaching of Touch, etc., upon the teaching of Interpretation 117
Command over Interpretation implies command over technical resources 117
Obedience to the laws of Touch and Technique must constantly be insisted upon 117
Knowledge of the laws of Touch and Technique necessary even for the beginner 118
Points as to Touch requiring constant reminder 119
Musical and Technical Attention must never be allowed to flag while giving attention to the details of Muscular Education 120
The bearing of Fingering on Interpretation, and the learning of its laws .. 121
Fingering, also, must not be "crammed" 122
Its proper teaching 122
The Memorising of Fingering 122
Scale fingerings, single and double notes 123

SECTION V

As to Pedalling and the Element of Duration

Just as close attention required for the foot as for the finger 125
Most pedalling a mass of blemishes 125
Examples of bad pedalling 126
Not enough to feel the breaks between the phrasings clearly, one must play them clearly 126
Inadequacy of Pedal-discontinuity 127
Accuracy in Duration-effects depends immediately upon accuracy in listening 128–129
Value of Duration-contrasts insufficiently realised 129
Gradations of Tone and Duration contrasted 130
Pedal-durations more important than Finger-durations 130
Pedal enhances actual prolongation of sounds 131
"Syncopated" pedalling 131

PAGE
Why syncopated pedalling is required 132
Legatissimo pedalling 133
Echo-resonance of a Hall different from pedal continuity 133
Examples of Legatissimo Pedalling 133
Pedal must rise fully 134
Pedal must remain up long enough 134
Half-damping effects 135
The "Sostenente" Pedal 135
Half-pedalling applied to whole chords 136
Cessation of sound as a form of emphasis 136
Examples of this 137–140
Imperative to listen accurately and constantly to Duration 141
Various additional Pedalling examples 141–146
Chopin's Pedalling 143, 144 and 89
Listen both to finger and to foot-doings 146
Attention during Performance 147

SECTION VI

THE PURPOSE OF ART-EXPRESSION AND ITS RELATION TO THE INFINITE

The ever-present danger of forgetting the End over the Means 148
The Purpose of Art is the expression of Feeling 148
Art-moods which make for Good and which make for Evil 149
Health and Mood 150
The nature of Music, its relation to all-pervading Rhythm, and its relation to the ultimately Unknowable 151
Summary: Report of Lecture on "The Principles of Teaching Interpretation" 154–163